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ABSTRACT

This paper summarizes the author's research on the pass/fail grading system at Washington State University. Specifically, the paper presents (1) a discussion of the use of the pass/fail grading option at WSU and enrollment trends under this option first available in summer 1968 as a 3-year experiment; (2) an analysis of the questionnaire responses, which dealt with reasons for enrolling under the pass/fail option, the use of pass/fail enrollment for exploration of courses outside the major, suggestions for improvement of the pass/fail programs, and rating the importance of the continuation of the option; and (3) a comparative analysis of the academic achievement of pass/fail and non-pass/fail enrollees during the first 2 years of the WSU experiment. (AF)

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THE PASS/FAIL OPTION: ANALYSIS OF AN EXPERIMENT IN GRADING

Presented to the

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGIATE REGISTRARS
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by

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This paper summarizes the author's research on the pass/fail grading system at Washington State University. Specifically, the investigation centered about: (1) examination of WSU pass/fail enrollment trends, (2) a survey of WSU undergraduate students to determine their reactions to the pass/fail experiment, and (3) a comparative analysis of the academic achievement of pass/fail and nonpass/fail enrollees during the first two years of the WSU experiment.

Use of The Pass/Fail Grading Option

The pass/fail grading program was adopted by the Resident Instructional Staff of Washington State University on May 16, 1968. As a three-year experiment, the option was available for the first time in summer session 1968, but widespread enrollment did not occur until the fall semester of the 1968-69 academic year. Slightly over 26 per cent of the undergraduate population enrolled under the option the first semester (fall 1968) while more than 40 per cent enrolled the spring semester. This fall-spring pattern

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was repeated the second year with more than 29 per cent enrolling under the option in fall 1969, and over 36 per cent in spring 1970.

Sophomores utilized the option to a greater extent than the other classes, followed by juniors, seniors, and freshmen in that order. When calculated by percentage of course enrollment, courses taken under the pass/fail option averaged only 7 per cent of total course enrollment. Enrollment under the pass/fail option by sex was nearly equal although the proportionate enrollment of women was greater than men in that the total university enrollment was comprised of approximately 60 per cent men and 40 per cent women.

The pass/fail option was used less frequently than it could have been during the first two years of the WSU pass/fail experiment. However, students from all academic departments and programs utilized the option with the preponderance of pass/fail enrollments within the Colleges of Sciences and Arts and Business and Economics. Departments and programs within the Colleges of Agriculture, Education, Engineering, Home Economics, Pharmacy, and Veterinary Medicine experienced relatively limited use of the option. More than 70 per cent of all pass/fail enrollments were in courses that met general university (distributive) requirements for graduation.[1]

Pass/Fail Enrollment by Grade Point Average

Based upon an analysis of individual cumulative grade point average compiled at the end of the previous semester, the percentage of regular enrollees exceeded that of pass/fail enrollees in each of four grade point

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[1]Pass/fail enrollment in courses meeting general university requirements toward graduation, as a percentage of total pass/fail enrollment by semester was as follows: fall, 1968--76.4%; spring, 1969--67.5%; fall, 1969-70--78.2%; and spring, 1970--67.1%.

average categories and at all levels of enrollment. The highest proportionate pass/fail enrollment was in the 2.50-2.99 g.p.a. range for all classes. The second highest category of pass/fail enrollment was that of 2.00-2.49, followed by 3.00 or more. The lowest proportionate pass/fail enrollment was in the 1.99 or less category (see Tables 1-4).

Differences in group means (g.p.a.) were computed by comparing the cumulative grade point average of all nonpass/fail students with that of all pass/fail students, based on all grades received at Washington State University except those earned pass/fail. The differences were extremely minor with the cumulative grade point average slightly higher for pass/fail enrollees in three of the four semesters studied.

Analysis of Questionnaire Responses

A precoded questionnaire was sent each year to a stratified random sample of approximately one-third of all students enrolled under the pass/fail option. Completed questionnaires returned were 580 (82.2%) the first year and 753 (84.7%) the second year. Responses were calculated by class and year surveyed, and were combined to produce an "all undergraduate response pattern" by year. Individual response scores were tested to determine significant differences between classes, survey years, and class/years.

Reasons For Enrolling Pass/Fail

As shown in Table 5 respondents indicated the following reasons for enrolling under the pass/fail option, in order of importance:

1. To reduce the competitive pressures of letter grading.
2. To complete a general university requirement.

TABLE 1

NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS ENROLLED PASS/FAIL AND NONPASS/FAIL WITHIN FOUR GRADE POINT AVERAGE RANGES, FALL 1968-69

Grade Point Range	Number and Percentage of Enrollees by Class								Total	
	Freshmen		Sophomores		Juniors		Seniors			
	P/F	NP/F	P/F	NP/F	P/F	NP/F	P/F	NP/F	P/F	NP/F
1.99 or less										
No.	40	89	41	117	25	76	6	38	112	320
%	7.7	3.3	4.7	6.9	3.7	5.0	1.0	2.2	4.2	4.2
2.00 - 2.49										
No.	95	143	281	491	236	486	178	602	790	1,722
%	18.2	5.3	32.4	29.1	35.0	32.2	28.5	35.5	29.4	22.7
2.50 - 2.99										
No.	39	52	269	364	207	405	255	631	770	1,452
%	7.5	1.9	31.0	21.6	30.7	26.8	40.9	37.2	28.7	19.1
3.00 or more										
No.	10	28	186	359	131	289	178	381	505	1,057
%	1.9	1.0	21.5	21.3	19.4	19.2	28.5	22.5	18.8	13.9
No GPA[a]										
No.	337	2,395	90	356	76	253	7	44	510	3,048
%	64.7	88.5	10.4	21.1	11.3	16.8	1.1	2.6	19.0	40.1
Total[b]										
No.	521	2,707	867	1,687	675	1,509	624	1,696	2,687	7,599
%	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.1	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.1	100.0

[a]The student's GPA refers only to grades received at Washington State University. Thus, freshmen and new transfers entering for the first time do not have a GPA.

[b]Totals do not always equal 100.0% due to rounding of numbers.

TABLE 2

NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS ENROLLED PASS/FAIL AND NONPASS/FAIL WITHIN FOUR GRADE POINT AVERAGE RANGES, SPRING 1969

Grade Point Range	Number and Percentage of Enrollees by Class								Total	
	Freshmen		Sophomores		Juniors		Seniors			
	P/F	NP/F	P/F	NP/F	P/F	NP/F	P/F	NP/F	P/F	NP/F
1.99 or less										
No.	202	247	79	122	50	105	11	51	342	525
%	19.9	15.0	7.6	9.1	5.5	8.0	1.1	3.2	8.7	8.9
2.00 - 2.49										
No.	351	465	373	415	352	495	341	552	1,417	1,927
%	34.6	28.3	35.8	31.1	38.4	37.7	34.9	34.2	35.9	32.6
2.50 - 2.99										
No.	249	364	324	364	308	386	384	583	1,265	1,697
%	24.6	22.1	31.1	27.3	33.6	29.4	39.3	36.1	32.0	28.7
3.00 or more										
No.	185	496	243	366	188	286	241	416	857	1,564
%	18.2	30.2	23.3	27.4	20.5	21.8	24.6	25.8	21.7	26.5
No GPA[a]										
No.	27	73	22	67	18	41	1	13	68	194
%	2.7	4.4	2.1	5.0	2.0	3.1	0.1	0.8	1.7	3.3
Total[b]										
No.	1,014	1,645	1,041	1,334	916	1,313	978	1,615	3,949	5,907
%	100.0	100.0	99.9	99.9	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.1	100.0	100.0

[a]The student's GPA refers only to grades received at Washington State University. Thus, freshmen and new transfers entering for the first time do not have a GPA.

[b]Totals do not always equal 100.0% due to rounding of numbers.

TABLE 3

NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS ENROLLED PASS/FAIL AND NONPASS/FAIL WITHIN FOUR GRADE POINT AVERAGE RANGES, FALL 1969-70

Grade Point Range	Number and Percentage of Enrollees by Class								Total	
	Freshmen		Sophomores		Juniors		Seniors			
	P/F	NP/F	P/F	NP/F	P/F	NP/F	P/F	NP/F	P/F	NP/F
1.99 or less										
No.	50	78	43	116	23	80	9	35	125	309
%	7.5	2.6	4.1	7.1	2.9	5.1	1.2	2.1	3.8	3.9
2.00 - 2.49										
No.	118	157	356	405	268	428	241	534	983	1,524
%	17.7	5.2	34.0	24.9	33.5	27.0	31.8	31.6	30.1	19.2
2.50 - 2.99										
No.	49	64	334	389	247	388	309	638	939	1,479
%	7.4	2.1	31.9	23.9	30.8	24.5	40.8	37.8	28.7	18.7
3.00 or more										
No.	18	42	191	372	190	366	186	450	585	1,230
%	2.7	1.4	18.3	22.8	23.7	23.1	24.6	26.6	17.9	15.5
No GPA[a]										
No.	431	2,682	122	347	73	321	12	32	638	3,382
%	64.7	88.7	11.7	21.3	9.1	20.3	1.6	1.9	19.5	42.7
Total										
No.	666	3,023	1,046	1,629	801	1,583	757	1,689	3,270	7,924
%	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

[a]The student's GPA refers only to grades received at Washington State University. Thus, freshmen and new transfers entering for the first time do not have a GPA.

TABLE 4

NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS ENROLLED PASS/FAIL AND NONPASS/FAIL, WITHIN FOUR GRADE POINT AVERAGE RANGES, SPRING 1970

Grade Point Range	Number and Percentage of Enrollees by Class								Total	
	Freshmen		Sophomores		Juniors		Seniors			
	P/F	NP/F	P/F	NP/F	P/F	NP/F	P/F	NP/F	P/F	NP/F
1.99 or less										
No.	146	283	62	122	39	137	13	46	260	588
%	14.6	13.9	5.8	8.4	4.2	8.7	1.4	2.7	6.6	8.7
2.00 - 2.49										
No.	282	518	365	473	284	494	299	582	1,230	2,067
%	28.3	25.4	34.0	32.6	30.8	31.5	32.5	33.8	31.4	30.4
2.50 - 2.99										
No.	287	498	353	408	340	486	347	633	1,327	2,025
%	28.8	24.4	32.9	28.1	36.9	31.0	37.7	36.7	33.9	29.8
3.00 or more										
No.	264	646	261	370	245	404	261	451	1,031	1,871
%	26.5	31.6	24.3	25.5	26.6	25.7	28.3	26.2	26.3	27.6
No GPA[a]										
No.	19	98	33	79	13	49	1	12	66	238
%	1.9	4.8	3.1	5.4	1.4	3.1	0.1	0.7	1.7	3.5
Total[b]										
No.	998	2,043	1,074	1,452	921	1,570	921	1,724	3,914	6,789
%	100.1	100.1	100.1	100.0	99.9	100.0	100.0	100.1	99.9	100.0

[a]The student's GPA refers only to grades received at Washington State University. Thus, freshmen and new transfers entering for the first time do not have a GPA.

[b]Totals do not always equal 100.0% due to rounding of numbers.

TABLE 5

REASONS FOR ENROLLING IN A COURSE UNDER PASS/FAIL OPTION, LISTED BY RESPONSES, ALL UNDERGRADUATES, FALL 1968-69 (N=580) AND FALL 1969-70 (N=753)

Reasons	Responses by Degree of Importance[a] and Percentage						Total[b]	MR[c]
	VH	H	A	L	VL	NR		
To explore outside the major without jeopardizing the GPA								
Fall, 1968-69	15.8	26.7	25.2	13.8	17.1	1.4	100.0	3.12
Fall, 1969-70	18.4	23.0	23.2	16.2	16.7	2.4	100.0	3.10
Did not have course prerequisite								
Fall, 1968-69	1.5	3.3	7.1	13.3	71.7	3.1	100.0	1.45
Fall, 1969-70	2.6	3.2	7.8	15.3	67.4	3.6	99.9	1.53
Insufficient time to study for the traditional letter grade								
Fall, 1968-69	13.1	28.8	30.0	15.5	11.5	1.0	99.9	3.17
Fall, 1969-70	14.8	30.9	30.5	12.6	8.2	2.8	99.8	3.33
Student wished to carry an overload								
Fall, 1968-69	4.1	7.6	8.4	20.3	56.9	2.6	99.9	1.79
Fall, 1969-70	3.8	8.3	12.5	18.7	53.4	3.2	99.9	1.88
To complete a GUR where interest or background were lacking								
Fall, 1968-69	38.4	16.9	11.4	8.4	23.6	1.2	99.9	3.39
Fall, 1969-70	40.6	15.7	12.1	11.3	18.6	1.7	100.0	3.51
Because the course was reputed to be very difficult								
Fall, 1968-69	8.4	16.9	17.8	18.8	36.5	1.5	99.9	2.41
Fall, 1969-70	9.3	15.3	20.6	19.1	33.4	2.3	100.0	2.47
To reduce the competitive pressures involved with letter grading								
Fall, 1968-69	28.4	35.7	19.3	8.1	6.4	2.1	100.0	3.73
Fall, 1969-70	26.0	32.4	22.3	8.5	6.9	3.8	99.9	3.65

[a]VH=Very High; H=High; A=Average; L=Low; VL=Very Low; NR=No Response.
[b]Total may not equal 100.0% because of rounding of numbers.
[c]MR = Mean Response Score.

3. Because of insufficient time to study for the traditional letter grade.

4. To explore outside the major without jeopardizing the grade point average.

The first area of significant difference (at the .01 level) was in opinion between classes concerning the use of the option "to complete a general university requirement." Response scores in this category were low for juniors and seniors but significantly higher for freshmen and sophomores, reflecting the fact that students normally complete general university requirements in their first two years of enrollment.

A second area of significant difference (at the .01 level) was between the first and second year group responses with regard to use of the option "because of insufficient study time." Although all classes responded positively to this statement, the opinions of juniors and seniors were the stronger. Upperclassmen in both groups and second year respondents in general, all experienced in terms of pass/fail, placed high importance on using the option as a method of "saving" study time. This tendency appears to correlate with the institutionalization of the option and increased student experience with regard to the value of option use.

Pass/Fail Enrollment as Exploration

In response to a statement regarding exploration outside the major, only 13.4 per cent of all respondents in the first year and 12.1 per cent the second year indicated they would not have enrolled in the course they had taken pass/fail if it had not been available under the option (see Table 6).

Suggestions for Change to the Pass/Fail Option

To elicit suggestions for improvement of the pass/fail program, students

TABLE 6

RESPONSES BY CLASS, FALL 1968-69 (N=580) AND FALL 1969-70 (N=753) TO QUESTION: "WOULD YOU HAVE TAKEN THE COURSE IF YOU COULD NOT HAVE TAKEN IT PASS/FAIL?"

Respondents, by Class	Responses								Total[a]	
	Yes		No		Undecided		No Response			
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Freshmen										
Fall, 1968-69 ...	71	63.9	16	14.4	19	17.1	5	4.5	111	99.9
Fall, 1969-70 ...	107	60.1	27	15.2	25	14.0	19	10.7	178	100.0
Sophomores										
Fall, 1968-69 ...	121	62.0	27	13.8	30	15.4	17	8.7	195	99.9
Fall, 1969-70 ...	148	59.9	27	10.9	38	15.4	34	13.8	247	100.0
Juniors										
Fall, 1968-69 ...	103	63.6	23	14.2	16	9.9	20	12.3	162	100.0
Fall, 1969-70 ...	124	65.3	20	10.5	20	10.5	26	13.7	190	100.0
Seniors										
Fall, 1968-69 ...	72	64.3	12	10.7	15	13.4	13	11.6	112	100.0
Fall, 1969-70 ...	88	63.8	17	12.3	11	8.0	22	15.9	138	100.0
All respondents										
Fall, 1968-69 ...	367	63.3	78	13.4	80	13.8	55	9.5	580	100.0
Fall, 1969-70 ...	467	62.0	91	12.1	94	12.5	101	13.4	753	100.0

[a]Totals do not always equal 100.0% due to rounding of numbers.

were reminded that pass/fail was an experiment at Washington State University, subject to change at the end of the three-year period. As participants, the students were told that their comments would be valuable and were asked to rate a series of suggested changes by degree of agreement with each. Respondents indicated positive agreement with the following suggestions, in order:

1. Allow pass/fail for all general university requirements.
2. Allow pass/fail enrollment for all elective course work.
3. Allow changes in pass/fail enrollment after the start of classes.
4. Increase the maximum pass/fail credit allowable.

Although response scores varied, as noted in Table 7, the following suggested changes were rejected:

1. Allow courses in the major subject to be taken pass/fail.
2. Delete a grade of "F" earned under pass/fail from the cumulative grade point average.
3. Permit instructors to know which students are enrolled under the pass/fail option.
4. Decrease the maximum pass/fail credit allowable.
5. Make all courses available under the option.

There was a significant difference (at the .01 level) between classes in response to the suggestion that pass/fail enrollment be allowed in all courses meeting general university requirements. Response scores were significantly lower for those students that have normally completed these requirements (juniors and seniors), although as a group all classes indicated strong positive agreement with this suggestion.

Another area of significant difference (at the .05 level) was between classes with regard to the suggestion that enrollment changes be allowed

TABLE 7

SUGGESTIONS FOR CHANGE TO THE PASS/FAIL PROGRAM AS INDICATED BY DEGREES OF AGREEMENT, ALL UNDERGRADUATES, FALL 1968-69 AND FALL 1969-70

Suggestions for Change	Responses by Degree of Agreement[a] and Percentage						Total[b]	MR[c]
	SA	A	U	D	SD	NR		
Increase the maximum pass/fail credit allowable								
Fall, 1968-69	34.6	26.7	14.5	19.3	4.3	0.5	99.9	3.68
Fall, 1969-70	37.2	27.8	14.2	17.0	2.9	0.9	100.0	3.80
Decrease the maximum pass/fail credit allowable								
Fall, 1968-69	0.8	1.9	10.0	32.6	53.9	0.7	99.9	1.62
Fall, 1969-70	0.7	1.3	8.2	31.8	56.8	1.0	99.8	1.57
Allow pass/fail enrollment for all general university requirements								
Fall, 1968-69	52.6	33.9	6.4	3.3	2.9	0.8	99.9	4.31
Fall, 1969-70	53.9	35.6	4.8	2.9	1.6	1.2	100.0	4.40
Allow pass/fail enrollment for all elective courses								
Fall, 1968-69	40.7	32.4	14.6	8.1	2.9	1.2	99.9	4.01
Fall, 1969-70	40.6	36.3	12.3	7.0	2.5	1.2	99.9	4.08
Allow courses in the major subject to be taken under pass/fail option								
Fall, 1968-69	11.7	17.2	17.4	26.7	26.4	0.5	99.9	2.61
Fall, 1969-70	14.1	18.3	21.5	23.9	21.0	1.2	100.0	2.81
Make all courses available under pass/fail option								
Fall, 1968-69	17.2	13.4	19.5	25.2	23.4	1.2	100.0	2.76
Fall, 1969-70	20.0	17.1	22.6	23.6	15.4	1.2	99.9	3.03
Allow changes in pass/fail enrollment after the start of classes								
Fall, 1968-69	40.5	27.6	9.5	10.2	10.2	2.1	100.1	3.80
Fall, 1969-70	40.6	32.4	8.8	11.4	5.6	1.2	100.0	3.93
Delete an "F" earned under pass/fail from the cumulative GPA								
Fall, 1968-69	17.2	11.9	12.6	28.8	27.4	2.1	100.0	2.62
Fall, 1969-70	16.7	13.0	14.5	28.8	25.1	1.8	99.9	2.69
Allow instructors to know which students are pass/fail enrollees								
Fall, 1968-69	3.4	2.4	8.1	24.8	60.3	0.8	99.8	1.63
Fall, 1969-70	2.5	3.3	8.8	28.3	55.9	1.2	100.0	1.68

[a]SA=Strongly Agree; A=Agree; U=Undecided; D=Disagree; SD=Strongly Disagree; NR=No Response.

[b]Totals may not equal 100.0% due to rounding of numbers.

[c]MR=Mean Response Score.

in pass/fail after the start of classes, with a marked increase in response scores for freshmen and sophomores.

A final area of significant difference (at the .01 level) was between classes in response to the suggestion that the maximum pass/fail credit allowable be increased. Although all classes indicated a strong positive agreement with this suggestion, response scores for freshmen were significantly higher than for the other classes.

Continuation of the Pass/Fail Program

When asked to rate the importance of the continuation of the pass/fail program, more than 90 per cent of the respondents in all classes in both years indicated that continuation of the pass/fail option was of "high" or "very high importance." Although the responses of all classes indicated strong support for continuation of pass/fail, there was a significant difference (at the .01 level) in opinion, between classes, with a slight decrease in interest shown by juniors and seniors.

Academic Achievement of Pass/Fail Enrollees

The traditional index of academic behavior is the letter grade. Of all grades awarded during the three semesters studied, 10,884 or approximately 7.0 per cent were for pass/fail enrollment. The mean grade distribution for all pass/fail enrollees compared with all nonpass/fail enrollees indicated a wide divergence in letter grades earned (see figure 1). Regularly enrolled students earned proportionately more than five times as many "A" grades and nearly 50 per cent more "B" grades as pass/fail enrollees. Conversely, pass/fail users received nearly four times as many "D" grades and more than twice as many "F"

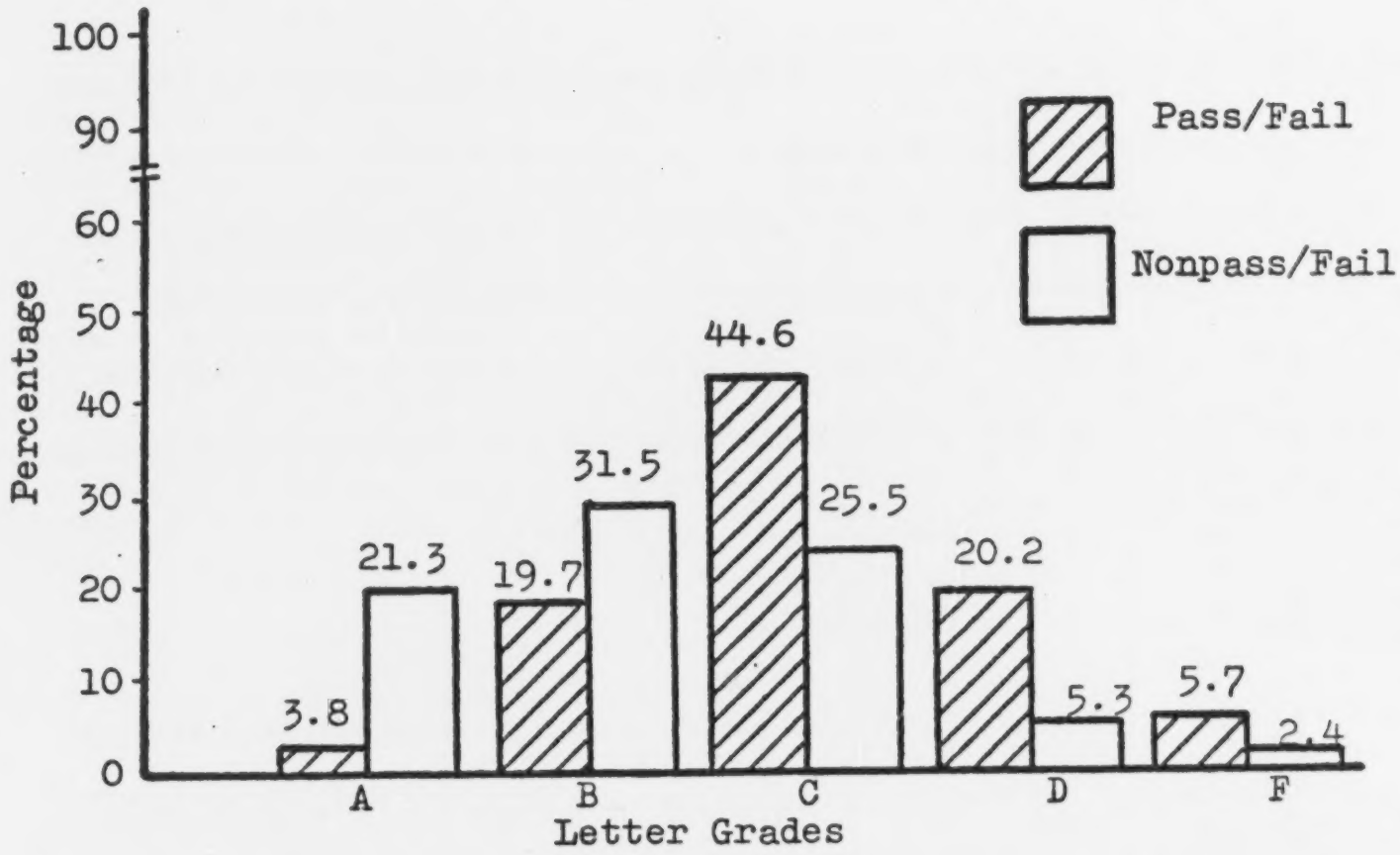

Fig. 1.--All Undergraduates: Pass/Fail and Nonpass/Fail Grade Distribution Based on Three-semester Composite.

grades as regularly enrolled students. In addition, the percentage frequency of "C" grades was substantially higher for option users (44.6 per cent compared to 25.5 per cent).

The distribution of grades earned in the College of Economics and Business and within the three divisions of the College of Sciences and Arts was substantially the same as the all-university grade distribution.[2]

The low incidence of pass/fail enrollment in the Colleges of Agriculture, Education, Engineering, Home Economics, Pharmacy, and Veterinary Medicine precluded the comparative analysis of letter grades earned within these colleges.

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[2]Pass/fail enrollees were not identified, thus instructors awarded regular letter grades for conversion to "P" or "F" by the Registrar (see Pass/Fail Brochure--Appendix A).

Conclusions

1. The use of pass/fail was only moderate during the first two years of the experiment, and when utilized, the option was generally used to complete requirements rather than for academic exploration. The basic justification for pass/fail was that it would encourage students to venture into unrequired academic areas, and in this regard, the success of the program was extremely limited.

2. In practice, students opted for pass/fail because of "grading pressures" and "lack of time," while discounting the concepts of pass/fail use because of course difficulty, lack of prerequisites, or to accommodate an overload. Thus, it was determined that the second philosophical premise of the pass/fail experiment—that of reducing the anxiety that stems from the pressures of competitive grading--proved successful for those using the option.

3. The percentage of regularly enrolled students exceeded that of pass/fail enrollees for all classes and in each of four grade point ranges studied. T-test analysis of end-of-semester cumulative grade point averages of all pass/fail and nonpass/fail enrollees indicated significant differences between means in two of the four semesters studied. However, due to the enormity of the samples tested, the differences, when observed, were too minute to be meaningful. It was therefore concluded that the pass/fail option was not used predominately by students with low grade averages, nor by those with high grade records, nor by any distinct middle group, although the greatest proportion of pass/fail users was within the 2.50-2.99 grade point range.

4. Students tended to receive substantially lower grades in courses taken pass/fail than in regularly graded course work. The tendency of pass/

fail enrollees to receive proportionately two to four times fewer "A" and "B" grades and more than double the proportion of "D" and "F" grades was consistent for all classes within all colleges. The academic performance of pass/fail enrollees was exceptionally low in courses taken within the Division of Sciences, the segment of the College of Sciences and Arts that accounted for nearly half (45.4 per cent) of the university-wide pass/fail enrollment.

5. Student participants indicated extremely favorable acceptance of the pass/fail program, with more that 90 per cent of the respondents in all classes strongly favoring continuation of the option. Several suggested changes in the option were heavily endorsed, which led to the conclusion that the pass/fail experiment did not completely satisfy the students' desires for changes in grading practices.

6. Extensive research is needed with regard to the validity and utility of all indices of academic achievement, including creativity, initiative, interest, motivation, and originality. The psychological impact of grading practices on the learning situation must also be assessed. It is therefore concluded that in order to adequately evaluate the pass/fail system researchers must attempt to determine what students have learned under various conditions (one of which is pass/fail) rather than base judgment solely on the grade that has been given.

APPENDIX A

1970-71
Third year of the

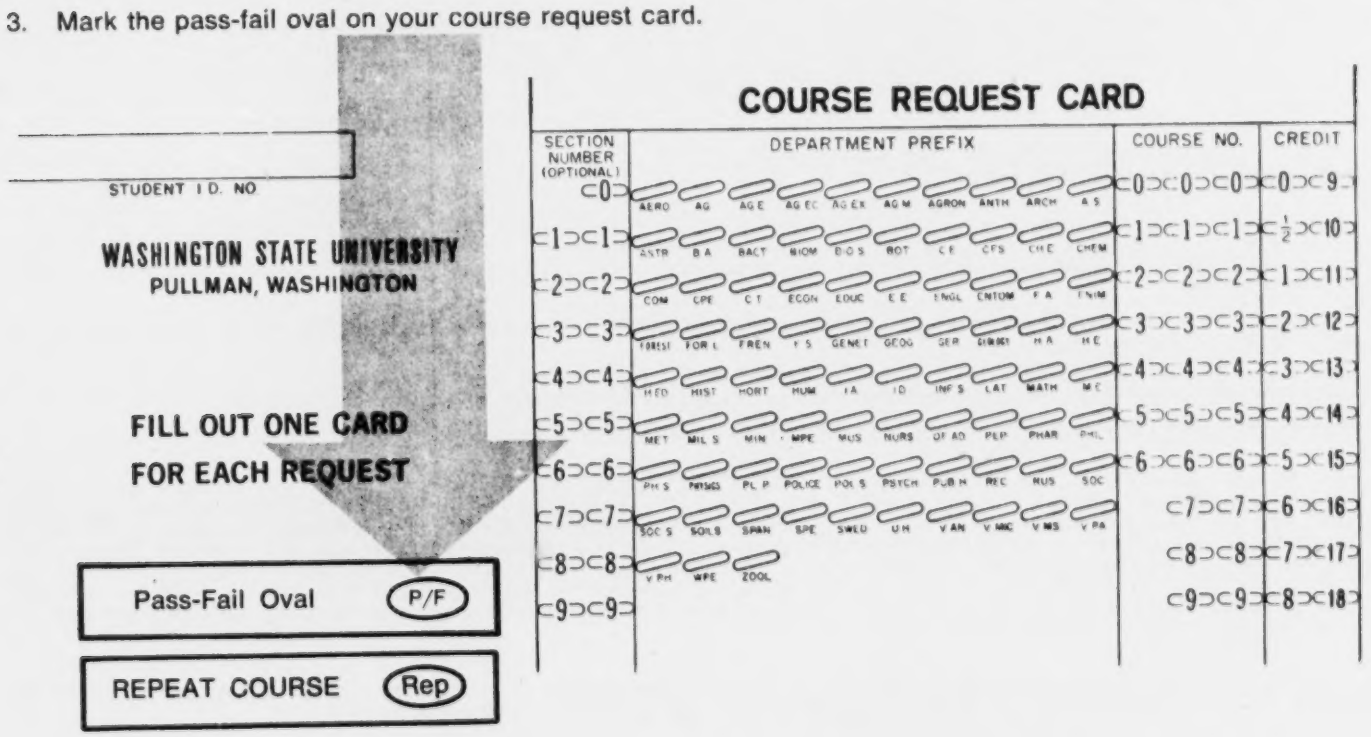
Pass Fail Experiment

Washington State University

PASSFAIL
PASSFAIL
PASSFAIL

How To Enroll Pass-Fail

1. CONSULT YOUR ADVISER FOR PASS-FAIL APPROVAL AND SIGNATURE.
2. Indicate with "P/F" on your enrollment card the courses you will take under the Pass-Fail Experiment.
3. Mark the pass-fail oval on your course request card.



Regulations

I. During any given semester, no more than six hours may be taken on a pass-fail basis. Summer Session pass-fail enrollment is limited to 3 hours or one course.

II. A total of 18 hours of courses may be taken on a pass-fail basis by students initiating and completing work at WSU for a four-year degree. Allowances for transfer students and for students enrolled in regular five-year undergraduate programs will be made on a pro rata basis. Upon initial implementation of the program the number of hours a student may take will be reasonably proportional to his class standing, i.e., a sophomore may take a total of about 14 hours in his remaining 6 semesters, a junior a total of 9 hours in his 4 semesters, and a senior 4 to 6 hours in his remaining year.*

III. A correct pass-fail enrollment, including adviser approval and signature, is the express responsibility of each student.

IV. Enrollment in course work under the pass-fail option must be completed during mass registration. No change in enrollment will be permitted with respect to a course taken on a pass-fail basis other than to drop the course. This means that students cannot add a course pass-fail or change from pass-fail to a letter grade or vice versa after enrolling.

V. It is illegal to repeat a course on a pass-fail basis in order to change a grade in a course previously completed on a letter grade basis. If this should happen, the original grade will stand.

VI. Information indicating which students are enrolled on a pass-fail basis does not appear on class lists transmitted to instructors. However, instructors may obtain data on the number of students enrolled on a pass-fail basis in their courses.

VII. Instructors will turn in regular letter grades for all students and the Registrar will change all grades of "A" through "D" to "P" for those enrolled under the "P/F" option. The Registrar will file the assigned letter grades (not on the permanent record) along with the information that the student was a pass-fail registrant for the purposes noted below:

a. For later evaluation of the program, including comparisons of performance of those registered for letter grades and those registered for pass-fail.

b. For use in departmental counseling. Departments have the prerogative of requesting from the Registrar's Office the letter grade for courses a prospective major has taken on a pass-fail basis. (This information is available on a moment's notice in the Registrar's Office. Qualified officials may request the information at any time by phone or by memorandum.)

c. After final grades have been recorded, instructors may request from the Registrar the names and grades of students in their classes who were enrolled on a pass-fail basis the previous semester.

VIII. A "P" grade is not included in computing a student's grade point average. An "F" grade in courses taken pass-fail is included in computing a student's total grade point average.

IX. Departments and programs with degree-earning students may exercise the right to deny their majors permission to take courses in their major field or courses needed to meet departmental requirements on a pass-fail basis.

X. The Honors Program may exercise the right to deny Honors Program participants permission to take courses meeting University Honors Program course requirements on a pass-fail basis.

XI. Courses meeting General University Requirements are not considered a special case with respect to the pass-fail proposal.

XII. After the proposed system has been in operation for a period of three years, it is to be submitted to a thorough review and evaluation leading to adoption, change, or rejection of the program.

The Educational Policies Committee will initiate the review of the Experimental Pass-Fail Grading System during the current academic year. A report will be submitted to the Resident Instructional Staff next spring. Student and faculty recommendations may be directed to the EPC Chairman, 813 Johnson Tower.

Background and Philosophy

The importance of achievement of high letter grades in high school and college work has increased in recent years, and this increase has been accompanied by mounting anxiety. Along with greater emphasis upon grades, pressures have developed for more and more specialized training.

In response to these pressures the pass-fail experiment was recommended. It is hoped that two benefits will be derived from the implementation of the pass-fail experiment:

1. An increased number of students will be encouraged to explore areas of interest.
2. The anxieties stemming from college adjustment and grade competition will be reduced.

In order for the pass-fail experiment to be successful students and advisers must be aware of the choices available via the Pass-Fail Option and the risks inherent in those choices. It is incumbent upon both parties to acquaint themselves with the regulations. Students who are considering enrollment in a course on a pass-fail basis should be aware of the risks inherent in pass-fail enrollment. For example, some academic honoraries may exclude students who have taken a number of hours pass-fail. Similarly, graduate and professional schools vary widely in their interpretations of transcripts which include several pass-fail hours. Students would be well advised not to "use up" all their pass-fail hours in lower-division courses, as this will prohibit their later pass-fail enrollment in upper-division courses. Finally students probably should avoid pass-fail enrollment in a course if there is some possibility that they will later change their major to the department offering the course.

*** On May 22, 1969, the Resident Instructional Staff approved the recommendation of the Graduate Faculty that graduate students be eligible to enroll in courses under the pass-fail program previously approved for undergraduates only.**